

Turkey—Where East meets West

by Gail L. Winfree

You won't find Turunc on most maps. This small, secluded fishing village is an hour either by boat or over a mountain pass from the resort town of Marmaris in southwest Turkey, where the Aegean meets the Mediterranean. Mountains and forests of wild pine hide Turunc from the mainland, while the blue Aegean gives it its livelihood. The one main road leading into and through the village changes from dirt to gravel in front of our hotel, the only modern building in the heart of Turunc.

We arrive, tired after 16 hours of traveling, at our hotel around one in the morning and go straight to bed. At sunrise, some four hours later, I get my first cultural shock. A man's voice, loud and hollow, wakes me. The voice, amplified by loud speakers, is that of the muezzin (priest), calling villagers to the mosque for prayer. I later learned that this ritual is performed five times a day and religious Moslems throughout Turkey respond each time. I also learned that approximately 99 percent of Turks are Moslems, although Islam is not the official religion since Turkey is a secular state.

You have to visit Turkey to appreciate this subtle blend of east and west.

Turkey is the 36th largest country in the world. It's twice the size of California and as big as East and West Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Italy combined. With 97 percent of the country in Asia, it's Europe's closet link to the orient.

A Greek story tells how a god fell in love with a beautiful girl named Europa. He turned himself into a white bull and, with Europa on his back, swam from Asia to a new continent. This continent was called Europe after the lovely girl. The place the bull swam across is the Bosphorus, which means bull-carry in Greek. The Strait of Bosphorus, connects the Sea of Marmara with the Black Sea, and separates the European side of Turkey from the Asian side. The modern 3,118-foot-long Bosphorus Bridge, completed in 1973, is the first bridge to link two continents.

Near the place where the bull swam the Bosphorus, there was an old Greek city called Byzantium, which was founded in the seventh century B.C. The Roman emperor Constantine rebuilt the city, renamed it Constantinople, and made it the capital in 330 A.D. Constantinople was a rich city and many of the buildings built by the Christian Roman emperors still stand. The greatest of these is the church, Sancta Sophia, built in the sixth century by Emperor Justinian. The high dome is supported by 107 columns, some of them taken from earlier Greek temples.

About 40 years before Columbus found America, Ottoman Turks swept out of central Asia and captured the country. Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent built the beautiful Blue Mosque.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (Father of the Turks) started the modernization of Turkey after World War I. Among many of his reforms, he abolished sultanate and changed the name of Constantinople to Istanbul and moved the capital to Ankara.

Today, sprawling, bustling Istanbul is home for more than five million people (the population has been growing by about 200,000 people a year) and the only place in the world where, without leaving the city, you can cross from one continent to another. Describing all of Istanbul's sight would take up most of this magazine. A few you shouldn't miss, though, include the Blue Mosque, Sancta Sophia, Topkapi Palace, Dolmabahçe Palace, Fethiye Mosque, Kariye Museum, Aqueduct of Valens, Süleymaniye Mosque and, of course, the Grand Bazaar, the largest shopping extravaganza in the world.

And shoppers beware: Turkey is a shopping paradise. Turkish carpets and towels, spices, copper and brass, crystal, ceramic plates, onyx, meerschaum, textiles, jewelry, and leather are just some of the buys you can find at bargain prices.

Most things in Turkey are cheap. A U.S. dollar buys about 1700 Turkish lira. In Istanbul, you can easily find a single room for \$10 a night, feast on a meal (Turkish cuisine has been ranked the third best in the world only behind French and Chinese) for two with drinks for about \$15, and get around town by public transportation for less than a dollar. Traditional drinks like tea, coffee, cola, and beer cost between 500 and 1000 Turkish lira. (Note: If you get thirsty, just walk around a shopping district. It's customary for shopkeepers to invite you into their shops for tea, while they show you their wares.)

Turks are honest, sincere, and hospitable. For the most part, they're simple people. They have little, but enjoy and share what they do have. They're curious about Americans and even in small villages, they don't hesitate to show their warmth and hospitality toward westerners. It's not uncommon for a Turk to offer to put you up and feed you within minutes of meeting you.

Turkey is an adventure regardless of how you travel or where you go. There's Istanbul and the Black Sea coast to the north; resort towns and ancient ruins all along the Aegean and Mediterranean coastline; and rugged mountains, dense pine forests, and numerous plateau regions inland.

For sports enthusiasts, there's plenty of skiing, yachting, diving, hunting, fishing (license not required), mountaineering, and white water rafting. Many campsites and recreation areas, along with 16 national parks and a favorable climate, make Turkey a year-round playground for young and old alike.

Turkey's beaches are some of the best in Europe, and not nearly as crowded, yet. Probably the most beautiful is Ölüdeniz, a silvery mile-long lagoon beach near Fethiye. There's also trendy Bodrum, which is called the St. Tropez of Turkey, for those looking for a more fun-loving cosmopolitan place to let loose.

Turkey's highest peak, Mt. Ararat, in the mountain region of eastern Turkey where the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers begin, is where, the Bible says, Noah landed his ark as the waters of the flood went down.

Over in the northeast corner of Turkey, scientists have discovered the ancient city of Troy. For hundreds of years, we knew of Troy only from an ancient Greek poem by Homer. He told of how the Greeks captured Troy. They built a huge wooden horse, filled it with soldiers, and then left it at the gate. When the horse was taken into Troy itself, the soldiers jumped out, surprising the townspeople, and captured the city.

The valley of Göreme in central Anatolia is one of the strangest places in the world. Here strange rock chimneys and cones of pumice have been carved out of the porous rock by wind and water. Whole communities of Christian monks took refuge here when Arab, Turk, and Moslem invaders swept into the land. The monks carved out chapels and sleeping cells, connected by long tunnels. Even tables and benches were carved out of the porous stone. Holy pictures, which still glow with color after hundreds of years, are painted on the walls of the rock chapels.

Then, there's the freak of nature known as Pamukkale (cotton castle), southeast of Izmir. Hot thermal springs flowing over the plateau edge have created a dazzling limestone formation of basins and a stairway of interlocking cliffs and water pools.